



Boy Files Suit Against **Straight Inc.** Claiming Physical, Mental Abuse

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A suit filed on behalf of a 14-year-old boy charges he was held against his will and physically and mentally abused for six months in a former Sarasota drug rehabilitation program.

The plaintiff, Benson ██████ seeks \$1.1 million in damages against Straight Inc., which temporarily suspended its operations on Cattlemen Road in July after three years. Although the troubled drug rehabilitation program has been the subject of similar lawsuits elsewhere, ██████ is the first ex-client of the Sarasota branch to press charges.

Sarasota attorney Larry Byrd alleges Williams "was beaten, hung by his underpants to a bedpost, picked up and carried about by his hair, mentally and physically tortured" and deprived of proper food, bathroom facilities, medical attention, psychological counseling and schooling beginning in January 1981."

quarters in St. Petersburg branch.

Straight also operates satellite programs in Cincinnati, Atlanta and Alexandria, Va.

Straight was regarded by some experts in the field of drug abuse as one of the most successful treatment programs in the nation, a distinction that helped it catch the attention of First Lady Nancy Reagan, who visited the St. Petersburg facility last year.

But recently Straight has had its share of problems, too. A federal jury awarded a former client \$220,000 this summer after he proved the St. Petersburg and Alexandria facilities held him against his will.

And in August, two Central Florida residents who claimed they were held against their will by Straight's St. Petersburg facility received out-of-court financial settlements.

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As a result of the abuse, Byrd contends that Williams suffers long-term emotional trauma and possible permanent internal injuries.

Byrd told the *Herald-Tribune* he plans to follow up Tuesday's lawsuit with a similar one next week on behalf of ██████████ 17-year-old brother, Lawrence, who was also enrolled in the drug rehabilitation program in 1981. Since both plaintiffs are minors, their suits must be filed by an adult, who in this case is their mother, Marcia.

Straight Inc. Executive Director Bill Oliver declined to comment on the suit when he learned of it from a reporter Tuesday afternoon. "Until I see it, I have a tough time responding to it," Oliver said. He added that he feels Straight will be cleared of the charges "when the facts are out."

"We'll be delighted to meet them in court," Oliver said.

Sarasota's Straight has graduated 165 youths since it opened Nov. 2, 1980. Officials said all 47 local teens enrolled when the program temporarily suspended operations July 20, amid a backlash by parents and criticism by Sarasota State Attorney James A. Gardner, voluntarily transferred to Straight's head-